

## Lyon 2006 - European Ideas Fair Speeches

European Ideas Fair

21 September 2006

Second Roundtable - *The European Agenda for Revival*

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I would like to focus on three words - 'Europe', 'ideas', and 'forum' - as a theme to reflect the theme of this conference.

I like the word 'forum' because it implies debate, comparing ideas, and I think that we never manage to compare ideas about Europe on a wide enough scale.

I like comparing ideas, debating, not just as an intellectual pleasure, but above all because of my democratic convictions, and I think we tend to forget, in France at least, that democracy is not just about voting, it is also about everything that comes before the ballot: the debate and comparing of ideas that I just mentioned. And if we, convinced Europeans, failed in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty, it was particularly, perhaps even principally, because we did not have any real debate on European issues in the months and years leading up to the referendum. I shall come back to this later.

Once we accept that debate is so important, we need to realise that we are in a very favourable period, because I think I am right in saying that there are going to be crucial elections in 10 of the EU Member States over the next few months. Sweden started last Sunday, and we know that 2007 is going to be an important year in this respect, particularly in France.

So 'forum' means debate, which is all very important.

When I was elected President of MEDEF just over a year ago, the president of a *French* organisation, the third or fourth sentence of my speech mentioned Europe and talked about the Lisbon Strategy. Among the French journalists and media that report my views, the economic journalists in particular, tease me because I'm always talking about the Lisbon Strategy. I go to meet company bosses out in the provinces, even those with really small companies, and I tell them about the Lisbon Strategy. I meet French MPs and I talk to them about the Lisbon Strategy. I often have the feeling that I am the only person talking about the Lisbon Strategy, yet in my view there is no finer project than trying to get the people of Europe to support the construction of the European Union. I may be joking slightly when I say this, but I really think that it wasn't the European Treaty that should have been

put to the French voters in the referendum, it should have been the Lisbon Strategy. I can assure you - I'm head of an opinion poll institute - that if the Lisbon Strategy had been put to the French voters, the result would definitely have been a 'yes', because when you tell people about the Lisbon Strategy they can finally see what Europe is going to be like in future. And since we are supposed to be thinking about 2020, when you really talk about the Lisbon Strategy and flesh it out and come up with simple indicators, we can clearly see what we might achieve by 2020 and how Europe might look by 2020.

When it comes to ideas, although debating is fine, discussions also need to produce new ideas. I think it is high time we changed the way we think and started to think outside the box.

Let me go back to what I said before about this being a favourable time because there are going to be important elections in a number of Member States. Let's make sure that new European ideas are put forward at these elections. I think it's very interesting that one of the probable candidates in the French presidential election recently gave a speech containing some very new ideas about how the Commission President should organise the Commission and the question of unanimity. What is important is that there should be things that appear to be really radically new. I think there is a lot of scope there, a lot of room for manoeuvre, provided that the European and national political parties also go along with this.

As I said, I want to ensure that the company bosses that I represent are not just there to tell Europe's decision-makers what we want - though we will still be doing this, of course - I also want to be able to tell them, more often than we have done up to now, what we can do for Europe. I think that we, the employers, can be spokesmen - spokesmen for the Lisbon Strategy, say. I think that we entrepreneurs have a vital role to play in today's world, and I often compare this to the vital role played in French history by teachers under the Third Republic, who taught the values of the fledgling Republic that was beginning to find its wings.

But more than that, they talked about the world that was beginning to surround those entering school at the time. I think that we employers, in the same way, are perhaps in the best position to tell our fellow citizens about the new world today, the completely unprecedented sort of world we are living in. Unprecedented is the key word here, because it means that it has never existed before, that there is no comparable model, and that every day we are finding out how its configuration is changing.

So I think that we employers can be an unbiased but committed driving force in Europe, if we go beyond our immediate, purely economic role, if we can describe the environment we are facing, and if we can also describe all the opportunities that we in Europe can derive from this, for everyone's benefit.